



A Short History of the ANC Women's League

From the ANC web site:

<http://www.anc.org.za/wl/docs/history.html>

The ANC when it was formed in 1912, did not accept women as members. There was no broad women's organisation during the first decades of the ANC's existence.

In 1931 the Bantu Women's League (BWL) was recognised as the women's branch of the ANC. Its first president was Charlotte Maxeke. The BWL was mostly involved in passive resistance and concentrated on the fight against passes for black women.

In 1943 women were formally admitted as ANC members. The ANCWL was formed in 1948. In spite of these organisational changes, women were still discriminated against by ANC men who located politics in a male environment. Women were used mainly for catering and mobilisation.

The issues of passes, Bantu education and beer halls dominated the activities of the women in the 1950s. Key activities were the Defiance Campaign of 1952 which confronted Verwoerd with the Women's Charter, and the mass demonstrations of August 9 1956 (which became Women's Day).

Organisationally, the Federation of South African Women, formed in 1954 as an umbrella body, helped the ANCWL's activities to spread. It was the first indication that the ANCWL wanted to be involved in improving the lot of women nationally, and not only within their own organisation. Federation brought together from the ANCWL, Coloured People's Organisation, Transvaal and Natal Indian Congress of Democrats.

The impact of women's activities led the male leadership to recognise the potential of the women's struggle. Thus started the integration of women into ANC structures. In 1956 ANCWL President Lilian Ngoyi was elected the first woman to join the ANC NEC.

The banning of the ANC and ANCWL in 1960 disrupted the process of integration of women into the central leadership circle. Regional organisers became important since they directed and managed the resistance on the ground.

Famous activists of the day included Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Dorothy Nyembe, Sophie du Bruyn, Ray Alexander and Rahima Moosa.

Even if the ANCWL activities gave them a new standing among ANC men, women still found themselves in a disadvantaged situation: they lacked skills and education; they were responsible for their children and their households; and the traditional image of women as weak, dependent creatures hampered the real involvement of women in the ANC structures and policies.

But internally the ANCWL struggled to develop an identity and systematic, consistent approach to policies. An ANCWL constitution was adopted.

Activities in this era centred mainly on mass action concerning passes and education.

In 1984 the ANC accepted the attribute "non-sexist" in its vision for a new South Africa.

Points from the

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS WOMEN'S LEAGUE

CONSTITUTION

As amended and adopted at the 4th National Conference August 2003

For the full text go to: <http://www.anc.org.za/wl/docs/constitution2003.html>

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To mobilise, organise and unite South African Women to participate in the struggle for the liberation of all oppressed groups;
- To spearhead the objectives, policies and programmes of the ANCWL and the African National Congress, amongst women in particular, and society in general;
- To spearhead the emancipation of women within the African National Congress and its structures and at all levels of government and South African Society as a whole;

CHARACTER

- The Women's League is based on the policies and principles of the African National Congress.
- Membership of the ANC Women's League is open to all women who are members of the African National Congress. The policies of the ANCWL are determined by its own membership in terms of the procedures laid down in its Constitution.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF MEMBERS

- Receive and impart information on all aspects of the ANCWL's policies and activities;
- Offer constructive criticism of any member, official, decision, policy, programme, activity or process and procedure of the ANCWL within its structures;
- Combat propaganda detrimental to the interests of the ANC and defend the policy and programmes of the ANCWL and the ANC;
- Observe discipline, behave honestly and loyally, and carry out the decisions of the majority and of higher bodies;
- Refrain from publishing and or distributing any media material without authorisation, which purports to be the view of any organised grouping, faction or tendency within the ANCWL.

ORGANISATION

1. The Branch Annual General Meeting which shall elect the Branch Executive Committee (BEC);
2. The Regional Conference which shall elect a Regional Executive Committee (REC);
3. The Provincial Conference which shall elect a Provincial Executive Committee (PEC);
4. The National General Council;
5. The National Conference which shall elect the National Executive Committee.

THE BRANCH

- Every member of the ANCWL shall belong to a branch, which shall be the basic unit structure of the Women's League, electing a BEC annually
- Branches may be grouped together into zones, sub-regions and may be subdivided into smaller units. Such units shall only be used as coordinating and administrative tools by the branch and shall not possess any decision-making powers. These units must operate on the basis of acceptable democratic principles and practices to promote management and active participation of membership.
- The branch shall be the place where members exercise their basic democratic rights to discuss and formulate policy and be the basic unit of activity for members and meet at least once per month.

REGIONS

- Each region shall hold a regional conference every two years, which shall elect the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Treasurer and a committee of not more than ten members.
- Each branch in good standing within a region shall be entitled to send delegates to the regional conference in proportion to its members.
- The regional executive committee shall be accountable to the PEC, the Regional Conference, and the Regional General Council for its functioning. The Chairperson and Secretary of each region shall serve ex-officio on the PEC.
- The powers of the regional executive committee are such powers as are delegated to it by the PEC.

PROVINCES

- The provincial conference shall be held every three years and elect the Provincial Executive Committee
- The conference shall be attended by delegates chosen by all branches with representation in proportion to the paid-up membership.

- Members of the NEC shall attend as ex-officio members, with full voting and speaking rights.

PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- The Provincial Executive Committee is the highest organ of the ANCWL in the Province between Provincial Conferences
- It shall submit reports to the NEC and the Provincial Conference as often as is required on the state of the organisation and membership, the financial position of the province and any other matter as may be specified.
- It shall carry out the decisions and instructions of the National Conference, the NGC, the NEC, the Provincial Conference and the Provincial General Council.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

- The highest organ of the ANCWL shall be the National Conference, convened at least every five years
- The National Conference shall elect the President, Deputy President, Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, Treasurer General, and the remaining 30 of the NEC members.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- The National Executive Committee is the highest organ of the ANCWL between National Conferences and has the authority to lead the organisation, subject to the provisions of this constitution.
- The National Executive Committee shall carry out the decisions and instructions of the National Conference and supervise and direct the work of the ANCWL and all its organs:
- The chairperson and secretary of each elected ANCWL Provincial Executive Committee shall be ex-officio members of the NEC, provided that they shall serve on the NEC for the period they hold their Provincial offices

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ANC

- The Women's League is an integral part of the African National Congress and is part of its mobilising machinery.
- All the organs of the Women's League shall closely co-operate with the National Executive Committee and National Working Committee of the ANC, the NEC's National Commission for the Emancipation of Women and Gender Equality, including the ANC departments and structures on all issues affecting women.
- The ANCWL shall receive an annual budget, together with the supplementary grants for specific projects and tasks from the office of the Treasurer General

of the ANC. The books of account of the ANCWL shall be open for inspection by the Treasurer General of the ANC.

Course: No Woman, No Revolution

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